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# Solidarity AI and the choices facin

Time for a public-interest approach to digital infrastructure, says the Plat

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Artificial intelligence does not exist only as software. It rests on data centres, electricity, chips, cables, la

How many agencies govern AI in Thailand?

What factors drive Thailand's AI optimism?

How does AI tech affect Thai exports?

DeeperDive | Ask Bangkok Post anything

A lithium-ion battery fire at South Korea's National Inforı
Service data centre in Daejeon on Sept 26, 2025, exposed
modern life depends on physical infrastructure. The blaze

nearly a full day, destroyed almost 100 government digi
and administrative record systems and disrupted hundrec

Recent attacks on energy infrastructure in the Middle Eas
reinforced the same lesson. Artificial intelligence does no
software. It rests on data centres, electricity, chips, cables
institutions. Put simply, AI is a human-built system that u
recognise patterns, generate content, classify information
predictions and support decisions.

Yet public discussion often treats AI as something almost
detached from cables, warehouses, workers and power gr
arguments around it, whether celebratory or critical, are
relatively small circle of executives, journalists, policyma
scholars clustered in the United States and Europe, who l
which questions get asked and which realities remain per

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They tend to frame AI as a story of innovation, investme
competition, or else as a debate about safety, bias and reg
concerns surely matter. But they do not fully capture how
Southeast Asia, where questions of labour, language and
dependency are more immediate.

## DISTURBING REALITY

Behind the headlines lies a different reality, shaped by in
concentrated power and inequality. Across outsourcing h
Manila, Nairobi and Hyderabad, thousands of workers re
content to train and maintain AI systems. Reports have d
depression, trauma, low pay and limited support.

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Guardian documented depression, insomnia, self-harm ar
attempt among low-paid moderators reviewing disturbing
Meta platforms in Ghana. The case points to a broader pa
layers of subcontracting shift risk downward, even as dec
and financial gains remain concentrated at the top.

Much of today's AI ecosystem operates through what can
as an "extraction stack": a vertically integrated system spa
resources, data centres, algorithms, labour and applicatio

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number of American tech companies control this stack, d
technologies are built, governed and deployed.

Efforts to regulate these systems through ethical guidelin
frameworks matter, but they often leave the deeper issue
ownership.

Who owns the infrastructure, governs the data and benef
value created? What long-term dependencies arise when
a handful of external providers for computing power, clo
core models? And when governments invest heavily in di
infrastructure, what other priorities may be deferred, incl
and public education?

Without addressing those questions, the underlying syste
scale, efficiency and market concentration, narrowing the
available to governments later on.

A solidarity ecosystem for AI is beginning to emerge, in v
institutions, cooperatives and civic solidarity economy or
shared infrastructure and more democratic forms of gove
AI as a set of institutional c soci
public priorities.

A practical example is the C ovat
the UK, where local authori ues-d
framework with governance appl
in participation, accountability and democratic oversight.

Across Asia, countries are answering these questions in di
Vietnam is building national data infrastructure as part o
for digital sovereignty. Singapore, meanwhile, offers a m
model: its SEA-LION open-source system for Southeast As
shows how public and research resources can serve the re
a single national market.

These efforts deserve attention, but they also raise a hard
national control enough on its own? Or does resilience re
regional infrastructure, public-interest standards and cros
cooperation that reduces dependence without recreating

AI begins far from the scr n comp
are extracted under diffic ıd infra
remains concentrated in t lers. A s
failure, commercial dispu can disr
across entire regions.

Alternative models are emerging, and for Thailand and it
cooperative and public-interest approaches to digital infr
suggest a more resilient alternative to dependence on a h
The region already has long traditions of cooperative org
extending those principles into digital infrastructure coul
resilience and control.

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The question is not only who uses AI, but who shapes the under which it operates, including data, labour and publi Thailand, this is especially sensitive because digital syste only technical; they also influence what becomes visible, punishable in public life.

As Janjira Sombatpoonsiri and her co-authors write: "Onl campaigns legitimise severe penalties against activists, m endorsement of these legal actions." More broadly, digita does not simply carry information. It also helps structure

## SOCIAL PURPOSE

That is one reason the next stage of the AI discussion in A only on adoption. It also has to address ownership, accou social purpose. Can AI serve farmers, workers, patients a communities, rather than making them more dependent platforms? Can it strengthen linguistic diversity, public t democratic oversight rather than weaken them?

These questions will be taken up at the Solidarity AI conf Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok from Nov 12 to 15, gathering will bring together researchers, AI developers, union organisers, cooperative leaders and digital rights a across Asia and beyond to consider how technology migh by and for the communities it affects.

In that sense, the challenge for Thailand is not whether t AI, but how to help shape a version of it that is grounded infrastructures on which modern life depends, accountab governance and resilient enough to serve the public whe fail, as they did in Daejeon.

Trebor Scholz, scholar-activist and founding director of t Cooperativism Consortium

**For more information and registration details for the conference, see the Platform Cooperativism Consorti website, https://platform.coop/events/solidarity-ai/**

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KEYWORDS Artificial intelligence | Digital infrastructure | Thailand technology po | Southeast asia digital sovereignty | Ai governance | Data centers | Tech labor right

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